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2017


# The Tyranny of Authority: Eternal Damnation in the Fragments of Clement of Alexandria?

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### Citation

Crosby, Daniel J., "The Tyranny of Authority: Eternal Damnation in the Fragments of Clement of Alexandria?" (2017). *Graduate School of Arts and Sciences*. 4.

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## The Tyranny of Authority: Eternal Damnation in the Fragments of Clement of Alexandria?

In the year 1715, John Potter published the most comprehensive edition of the extant writings of the Clement of Alexandria, the second-century Church Father who is most famous for his apologetic *Protrepticus* and intensely philosophical *Stromata*. Potter's edition includes a collection of fragments, and among these fragments, this one is conspicuous:

Ἀθάνατοι πᾶσαι αἱ ψυχαὶ, καὶ τῶν ἀσεβῶν, αἷς ἄμεινον ἦν μὴ ἀφθάρτους εἶναι.  
Κολαζόμεναι γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀσβέτου πυρὸς ἀπεράντῳ τιμωρίᾳ καὶ μὴ θνήσκουσιν, ἐπὶ  
κακῷ τῷ ἑαυτῶν τέλος λαβεῖν οὐκ ἔχουσιν.<sup>1</sup>

All souls are immortal, even those of the wicked, for whom it is better that they were not deathless. For, punished with the endless vengeance of quenchless fire, and not dying, it is impossible for them to have a period assigned to their misery.<sup>2</sup>

This fragment would represent the single clearest expression of Clement's thoughts on hell and punishment in the entire corpus: the wicked are damned eternally. As the source of this fragment, Potter cites the *Loci communes*, an anthology of famous quotations compiled by Maximus the Confessor, which reports the passage under the heading "of Clement."<sup>3</sup> All of the nineteenth-century critical editions of Clement's writings include the fragment in their collections: thus, Klotz in 1834,<sup>4</sup> Le Nourry in 1858,<sup>5</sup> and Dindorf in 1869,<sup>6</sup> all clearly relying on Potter's

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<sup>1</sup> John Potter, ed., *Clementis Alexandrini Opera, Quae Exstant*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Sheldonian Theater, 1715), 1020. See "**Potter (1715)**," below.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Liturgies and Other Documents of the Ante-Nicene Period*, vol. 24, Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872), 163; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, vol. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325 (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 580.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the facts that nothing like these words is found in those writings of Clement that are preserved more completely, that the fragment pertains to a doctrine of the soul, and that Maximus the Confessor includes it in a section titled "on the soul," Potter hypothesizes that the text comes from a lost treatise of Clement that was also called "on the soul." Potter, *Clementis Alexandrini Opera, Quae Exstant*, 2:1020. See "**Potter (1715)**," below and Maximus, *Serm.* 53.

<sup>4</sup> Reinhold Klotz, ed., *Titii Flauii Clementis Alexandrini Opera Omnia*, vol. 4 (E.B. Schwickert, 1834), 83. See "**Klotz (1834)**," below.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolai Le Nourry, ed., *Clementis Alexandrini Opera Quae Exstant Omnia*, vol. 8, Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1857), 751–2. See "**Le Nourry (1858)**," below.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Dindorf, ed., *Clementis Alexandrini Opera*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869), 499. See "**Dindorf (1869)**," below.

authority directly or indirectly. There are, though, two famous Early Church Fathers named Clement, and this fragment actually belongs to the *Homilies* that circulate under the name of Clement of Rome, the first-century Pope,<sup>7</sup> not to any work of Clement of Alexandria. Potter, therefore, must have read the heading “of Clement” and assumed incorrectly that it belonged to his Clement.

In his early-twentieth century edition, Stählin correctly assigns the fragment to the texts associated with Clement of Rome and omits it from his collection, but his work said too little and appeared too late. It was too little, because he did not offer an argument for excluding the fragment; he only included it in a simple list and chart of misattributed fragments.<sup>8</sup> Although Stählin’s critical edition became and remains the authority for scholars who have Greek, the lack of discussion about his decision to exclude the fragment made it difficult for anyone who was not intimately familiar with the preceding editions to notice that he had chosen to leave it out. It was too late because Roberts and Donaldson had already published an English translation of the collected fragments of Clement of Alexandria in 1872 as part of the large and influential series containing writings of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, relying on Le Nourry’s edition.<sup>9</sup> Their translation became the authority for those who did not focus on the Greek text. As a result of the

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<sup>7</sup> ἀθάνατος γὰρ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τῶν ἀσεβῶν, οἷς ἄμεινον ἦν μὴ ἄφθαρτον αὐτὴν ἔχειν. κολαζομένη γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀσβέστου πυρὸς ἀπεράντω τιμωρία καὶ μὴ θνήσκουσα, ἐπὶ κακῷ τῷ αὐτῆς τέλος λαβεῖν οὐκ ἔχει. Ps.-Clem. Rom. *Hom.* 11.11.2.

<sup>8</sup> Otto Stählin, ed., *Clemens Alexandrinus: Protrepticus Und Paedagogus*, vol. 1, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1905), LXII; Otto Stählin, ed., *Clemens Alexandrinus: Stromata Buch VII Und VIII—Excerpta Ex Theodoto—Eclogae Propheticae—Quis Dives Salvetur—Fragmente*, vol. 3, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1909), LXXI.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 2, above and “**Roberts and Donaldson (1872)**,” below. Interestingly, Le Nourry’s admittedly confusing format of presentation for the two fragments, which Potter assigned to a treatise titled “on the soul,” has led to a misunderstanding about their respective sources. Roberts and Donaldson clearly cite Cod. Barocc. 143 as the source for the fragment about eternal punishment, but this manuscript actually records the earlier fragment. Cf.: Κλήμεν(τος) (/) Πάντων ἀναπνέουσαι αἱ ψυχαί: τὸ ζῆν ἔ(/)χουσι: κ’ ἂν χωρισθῶσι τοῦ σώματος: (καὶ) (/) τὸν εἰς αὐτὸν εὗρεθῶσι πόθον ἔχουσαι: εἰς τὸν τοῦ θ(εο)ῦ κόλπον φέρονται ἀθάνατοι (/) ὡς ἐν χειμῶνος ὥρα οἱ ἄτμοι τῆς γῆς (/) ὑπὸ τῶν τοῦ ἡλίου ἀκτίνων ἐφέλκόμε(/)νοι: φέρωσιν πρὸς αὐτὸν. Cod. Barocc. 143, 181r13–20. See “**MS. Barocc. 143, 181r13–20**,” below.

dependence of scholarship on either of these editions, a significant divide on the issue of punishment and hell in the writings of Clement of Alexandria arose, and these two, mutually exclusive positions have remained all but entirely discrete. One group, relying on Stählin, rightly supported a more Platonic view of corrective punishment that leads eventually to universal salvation,<sup>10</sup> but the other, relying on Roberts and Donaldson, incorrectly perpetuated a myth of eternal damnation in Clement's thought.<sup>11</sup> Neither was in conversation with the other.

This brief analysis helps engage two discrete traditions in debate, and helps us ultimately to prefer one, having proved the other to be dependent upon Potter's misattribution of the fragment. Clement did not think of the punishment of the soul as persisting eternally. More importantly, though, I think that this investigation raises an important question that is more broadly relevant to the disciplines of Classics and Early Christian Studies, namely, how ought scholars engage with the critical editions of the texts that they study. With regard to this question, this case study demonstrates not only that editors' decisions can have a profound, lasting, and unnoticed effect on later scholarship, but also that a lack of appreciation of the theories, ideas, and traditions that underlie editorial decisions can elevate the text from a level of authority to a tyranny. By way of conclusion, then, I suggest that the best way to combat this

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<sup>10</sup> Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 44–7; John R. Sachs, "Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 118–20; Zachary J. Hayes, "The Purgatorial View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 100–1; Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 124–7.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Stoughton Potwin, *The Triumph of Life: A Biblical Study of God's Way with Our Race* (New York: John B. Alden, 1886), 175; Francis Ryan Montgomery Hitchcock, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: S.P.C.K., 1899), 73; William E. G. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, Oxford Theological Monographs. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 67; Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 109–10; Sharon L. Baker, *Razing Hell: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about God's Wrath and Judgment* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 6; Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson, *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 13. Salmon is the only one to acknowledge both thoughts in Clement's corpus and is rightly confused over it. Stewart Dingwall Fordyce Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), 628–9.

tyranny of authority is to remain critical of our printed texts and to stay cognizant of the fact that what we read in a standard critical edition and modern translation is the result of countless decisions that were made by, in some cases, hundreds of people other than the author. To a greater or lesser degree, positively or negatively, these people are always at work influencing our thoughts about a text and its author, and it is helpful to remember that their voices occupy this same textual space.

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**Graduate Student Research Symposium, March 29, 2017**

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FRAGMENTA Libri *De Anima*:EX MAXIMI Serm. LIII. *De Anima* pag. 656. & ANTONIO MELISSA.

OMNIBUS solutæ ac respirantes animæ vitam habent, & licet à corpore separatæ existant, inque illud desiderio ferantur, in Dei tamen sinum evolant immortales: haud secus ac hyberna tempestate terreni vapores radiis folis attracti, versus ipsum feruntur.

ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ἀναπνεύσαι αἱ ψυχαὶ τὸ ζῆν ἔχουσι, καὶ χωρισθῶσι τὸ σῶμα τοῦ εἰς αὐτὸ εὐρεθῶσι πόθον ἔχουσαι εἰς τὸ θεοῦ κόλπον φέρονται ἀθάνατοι, ὡς ἐν χειμῶνος ὥρᾳ οἱ ἀτμοὶ τῆς γῆς ὑπὸ τῶν τοῦ ἡλίου ἀκτίνων ἐφελκόμενοι φέρονται πρὸς αὐτόν.

Hæc sententia quoque legitur Cod. 143. Barocc. cap. περὶ ἐπιμελείας ψυχῆς fol. 181. p. 1.

Immortales sunt omnes animæ, etiam impiorum; quibus præstaret, haud esse incorruptibiles. Dum enim ignis inextinguibilis perpetuo torquentur supplicio, nec unquam moriuntur, nullum malo suo finem nancisci possunt.

Ἀθάνατοι πᾶσαι αἱ ψυχαὶ, καὶ τῶν ἀσεβῶν, αἵς ἄμεινον ἦν, μὴ ἀφθάρτους εἶναι. κολαζόμεναι γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀσβέστου πυρὸς ἀπεράντῳ τιμωρίᾳ καὶ μὴ θνήσκουσαι ἐπὶ κακῷ τῷ ἑαυτῶν τέλος λαβεῖν οὐκ ἔχουσιν.

Hæc cum in editis Clementis Alexandrini libris nusquam reperiantur, ex ejus lib. *De Anima* omnino petita videntur, cum ad doctrinam de ea pertineant, & à Maximo in cap. *De Anima* allegentur.

Fragmenta libri *de anima*.EX MAXIMI Serm. LIII. *De anima* p. 656. et Antonio Melisse.

Πάντων ἀναπνεύσαι αἱ ψυχαὶ τὸ ζῆν ἔχουσι, καὶ χωρισθῶσι τοῦ σώματος καὶ τὸν εἰς αὐτὸ εὐρεθῶσι, πόθον ἔχουσαι εἰς τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ κόλπον φέρονται ἀθάνατοι, ὡς ἐν χειμῶνος ὥρᾳ οἱ ἀτμοὶ τῆς γῆς ὑπὸ τῶν τοῦ ἡλίου ἀκτίνων ἐφελκόμενοι φέρονται πρὸς αὐτόν.

Eadem sententia legitur Cod. Barroc. 143. cap. 15 περὶ ἐπιμελείας ψυχῆς fol. 181. p. 1.

Ἀθάνατοι πᾶσαι αἱ ψυχαὶ καὶ τῶν ἀσεβῶν, αἵς ἄμεινον ἦν μὴ ἀφθαρτοὺς εἶναι. κολαζόμεναι γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀσβέστου πυρὸς ἀπεράντῳ τιμωρίᾳ καὶ μὴ θνήσκουσαι ἐπὶ κακῷ τῷ ἑαυτῶν τέλος λαβεῖν οὐκ ἔχουσιν.



XI.

FRAGMENTA.

Ex Clementis Alexandrini libro *De anima*.

(Ap. *Maximum*, *serm.* 53, *De anima*, p. 156, et *Antonium Melissam*.)

Omnes solutæ ac respirantes animæ vitam habent, et licet a corpore separatæ existant, inque illud desiderio ferantur, in Dei tamen sinum evolvant immortales; haud secus ac hiberna tempestate terreni vapores radiis solis attracti, versus ipsum feruntur.

Πάντων ἀναπνεύουσαι αἱ ψυχὰς τὸ ζῆν ἔχουσι, καὶ χωρισθῶσι τοῦ σώματος καὶ τὸν εἰς αὐτὸ εὐρεθῶσι πόθον ἔχουσαι, εἰς τὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ κόλπον φέρονται ἀθάνατοι· ὡς ἐν χειμῶνος ὥρᾳ οἱ ἀτμοὶ τῆς γῆς ὑπὸ τῶν τοῦ ἡλίου ἀκτίνων ἐφελκόμενοι, φέρονται πρὸς αὐτόν.

*Haec sententia quoque legitur cod. 145, Barocc., cap. Περὶ ἐπιμελείας ψυχῆς, fol. 181, p. 1.*

Immortales sunt omnes animæ, etiam impiorum, quibus præstaret, haud esse incorruptibiles. Dum enim ignis inexstinguibilis perpetuo torquentur supplicio, nec unquam moriuntur, nullum malo suo finem nancisci possunt.

Ἀθάνατοι πᾶσαι αἱ ψυχὰς, καὶ τῶν ἀσεβῶν, αἷς ἄμεινον ἢν μὴ ἀφθάρτους εἶναι. Κολαζόμεναι γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀσβέστου πυρὸς ἀπεράντῃ τιμωρίᾳ καὶ μὴ θνήσκουσαι, ἐπὶ κακῷ τῷ ἑαυτῶν τέλος λαβεῖν οὐκ ἔχουσιν.

Περὶ ψυχῆς.

1020 P.

Ex Maximi Serm. 53. "De anima" p. 656. et Antonii Melissa.

5 Πάντων ἀναπνεύουσαι αἱ ψυχὰς τὸ ζῆν ἔχουσι, καὶ χωρισθῶσι τοῦ σώματος καὶ τὸν εἰς αὐτὸ εὐρεθῶσι πόθον ἔχουσαι, εἰς τὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ κόλπον φέρονται ἀθάνατοι, ὡς ἐν χειμῶνος ὥρᾳ οἱ ἀτμοὶ τῆς γῆς ὑπὸ τῶν τοῦ ἡλίου ἀκτίνων ἐφελκόμενοι φέρονται πρὸς αὐτόν.

Haec quum ex Clemente afferat Maximus in capite *περὶ ψυχῆς*,  
10 ex Clementis libro *περὶ ψυχῆς* sumta esse conjecit Potterus.

Eadem sententia legitur in cod. Barroc. 143. cap. *περὶ ἐπιμελείας ψυχῆς* fol. 181. p. 1.

Ἀθάνατοι πᾶσαι αἱ ψυχὰς καὶ τῶν ἀσεβῶν, αἷς ἄμεινον ἢν μὴ ἀφθάρτους εἶναι. κολαζόμεναι γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀσβέστου πυρὸς ἀπεράντῃ  
15 τιμωρίᾳ καὶ μὴ θνήσκουσαι ἐπὶ κακῷ τῷ ἑαυτῶν τέλος λαβεῖν οὐκ ἔχουσιν.



Clem. Alex.	Sacra Parall. Nr. bei Holl	Corp. Paris. Clemens-Fragm.	Maximus ed. Combef. Cap. Monac. 429 f.	Antonius ed. Gesner S.	Initien	Be- merkungen
	14 16		55 53		οὐ δυνατόν τινα ἀθάνατοι πᾶσαι αἱ φύσας	Clemens Romanus
	22, 2—7		53	84 <sup>r</sup>	πάντων ἀναπνέον- σαι	
Paed. I 20	186	Nr. 6	1	109	ἡ τῶν κακῶν ἀπαλ- λαγή	
Paed. I 81	187			22	καλὸν μὲν τὸ μὴ ἁμαρτάνειν	
Paed. II 24				50	πᾶς γὰρ οὐκ ὀρθοῦς ἀνὴρ	
Paed. II 39	189			38	πλοῦτος ἄριστος	
Paed. II 45	191			85 <sup>r</sup>	μιμητὰς δὲ ἀνθρώ- πων	

## X. Unechte Fragmente.

### 1. Bei Dindorf III 490, 4—512, 14.

490, 4—8 Ἀλλὰ τὰ τοῦ Ἰωβ — αἰδοῦς εἰδώλου ist zu Strom. IV 160, 1 gestellt. Die Fortsetzung 490, 8—491, 29 gehört, wie schon Potter erkannte, Clemens nicht an; vgl. auch Zahn, Forsch. III S. 6.

491, 31—33 *Non hic hominis — magnitudinem declarare* ist die Übersetzung von Fr. 57.

491, 35—492, 9 *Fortis autem per viotas — cum operantibus iniquitatem* ist die Übersetzung von Fr. 58.

492, 11 f Ποιητέον ἐλεημοσύνας — παρὰ τοῦ ἐφίστου ist eine Verkürzung von Fr. 53. Die Fortsetzung 494, 12—15 οὐαὶ δὲ τοῖς ἔχουσι — λαμβάνων κατακριθήσεται stammt aus Constit. apost. IV 3; vgl. oben S. LXV f Bem. zu Fr. 53.

492, 17—20 Ὁ τῆς τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείας — εὐκрасία περιγίνεται ist zu Paed. I 96 gestellt. Die Fortsetzung 492, 21—25 εἰς τοσαύτην δὲ αὖξην — μετεώρους ψυχάς ist Fr. 54.

492, 27—31 Ἔστι μαργαρίτης — ὑγροῦ ἐκλάμψας σώματος ist zu 6 Paed. II 118, 5 gestellt.

493, 20—30 Der erste Teil καὶ τοσοῦτον, φησὶν, — ἀκήρατον ἔχει σῶμα gehört Clemens nicht an; vgl. oben S. XXXIV Bem. zu Fr. 2; der zweite Teil ὥσπερ ἡμῶν τὸ κατὰ σάρκα — ἐν δ' Ὑποτυπώσεις ist Fr. 2 (= Dind. III 493, 10—14) in etwas vollständigerer Form.

494, 2—9 Der erste Teil καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ θερμὸν — αὐτοῦ τὴν 8 ψυχὴν gehört Clemens nicht an; vgl. oben S. XXXIV Bem. zu Fr. 3; der zweite Teil ἡ καρδία — ἐν τετάρτῃ Ὑποτυπώσεις ist Fr. 3 (= Dind. III 493, 16—18).

497, 22—27 τὸ τηνικαῦτα δέ — ἀρεῖται διακονίαν stammt nicht mehr aus Clemens; vgl. oben S. XLI Bem. zu Fr. 14.

499, 5—8 Πάντων ἀραπνέουσai — φέρουσαι πρὸς αὐτόν (aus 10 Maximus Cap. 53; Barocc. 143 f. 181<sup>r</sup>; auch in Laur. VII 15 f. 226<sup>v</sup>; Flor. Monac. [= Melissa Augustana] f. 84<sup>r</sup>) ist Sacr. Par. 22, 2—7 Holl = Pseudo-Clemens Hom. XVII 10.

499, 13—16 Ἀθάνατοι πᾶσαι — οὐκ ἔχουσιν (aus Maximus Cap. 53; 11 auch in Laur. VII 15 f. 226<sup>v</sup>) ist Sacr. Par. 16 Holl = Pseudo-Clemens Hom. XI 11.

499, 20—23 Μηδέποτε αἰδεσθῆς — τὸν πλησίον λασάμενος aus 12

(VI.)

FROM THE BOOK "ON THE SOUL."

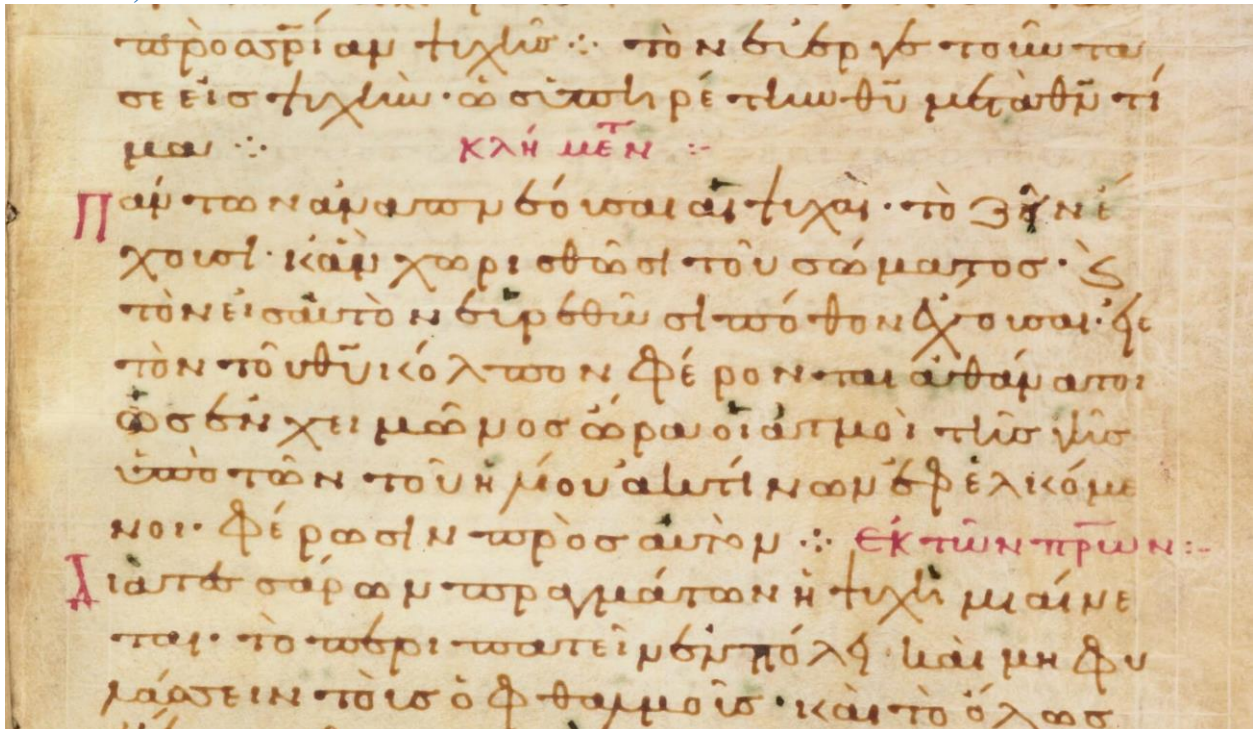
FOUND IN MAXIMUS, SERMON 53, "ON THE SOUL," P. 156,  
AND ANTONIUS MELISSA.

Souls that breathe free of all things, possess life, and though separated from the body, and found possessed of a longing for it, are borne immortal to the bosom of God: as in the winter season the vapours of the earth attracted by the sun's rays rise to him.

FOUND IN THE BAROCC MS. 143, FOL. 181, P. 1, CHAPTER  
"ON CARE FOR THE SOUL."

All souls are immortal, even those of the wicked, for whom it were better that they were not deathless. For, punished with the endless vengeance of quenchless fire, and not dying, it is impossible for them to have a period put to their misery.

MS. Barocc. 143, 181r13-20



The full, digitized MS can be found at [The Bodleian Library Webpage](#)